



PREVENTION TALK

THE IMPACT OF PARENTS CONDONING TEEN ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUG USE

WRITTEN BY LYNDA KAMERRER

EDITED BY KRIS GABRIELSEN AND JACK WILSON

Issue Number 17

CSAP'S WESTERN CENTER FOR THE
APPLICATION OF PREVENTION TECHNOLOGIES
JULIE HOGAN, PH.D. DIRECTOR

What do teenagers think when parents overlook, disregard, or pardon their drinking, smoking, or other drug use? In the absence of a clear family policy or consequences, at least some of them will reach the conclusion that it's okay with their parents to do those things. Others might wonder if anyone cares what they do. According to a recent book by the National Research Council, adolescents are coming of age in a culture that promotes and enables underage drinking.¹ One of the most consistent findings in studies of adolescent substance use, delinquency, school failure, and pregnancy is that problems are interrelated.² If a teen is drinking or smoking, they are at greater risk to become involved with other youth problem behaviors.

REMEMBER:

Take action to prevent your child from engaging in risky behavior.

In order to understand these phenomena we might also want to know what is going through the minds of parents when they condone youth substance use. Several recent surveys suggest that parent perceptions of youth drinking are skewed toward underestimating the amount and frequency of use. For example, in one survey, 31% of the youth who said they had been drunk in the past year were said by their parents to be nondrinkers, and 27% of those who said they had had 5 or more drinks in the past month were said by their parents to be nondrinkers.¹

Parental attitudes and family supervision strongly influence young people's choice of peers and adolescents' decisions to use or not use alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs. Where family connectedness is high, parental influence can be significant, even when it conflicts with peer attitudes and behaviors. Parents play a critical role in shaping peer associations of their children and in directly

influencing behavior through the values they instill by communicating directly and modeling healthy behaviors.

THINK ABOUT:

- What messages do teens in your local area get from their family, friends, teachers, and the community about alcohol, tobacco or illicit drug use?
- How could you enlist the support of other parents to strengthen monitoring and communication for your children and their friends?

ACTION STEPS:

- Set a clear no-use policy for children in your family, spelling out the consequences if violated and remember to give recognition and praise for following family expectations.
- Keep the dialogue going with your teen, establish regular times to talk about concerns.
- Know your children's friends and their parents' attitudes towards alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use.
- Visit the Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy and Drug Free website, <http://family.samhsa.gov>.

For more information call:

SOURCES:

- ¹ Bonnie, R.J. & O'Connell, M. E. (Eds.). (2004). *Reducing underage drinking: A collective responsibility*. Washington, DC: The National Academy Press.
- ² Romer, D (Ed.). (2003). *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- ³ United States Department of Health and Human Services and SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information. (2002). *Preventing substance abuse: Major findings from the national cross site evaluation of high-risk youth programs*. Retrieved November 12, 2004, from <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/FO36/monograph1.aspx>